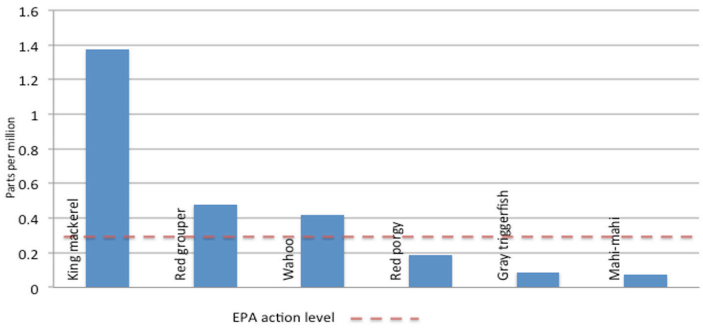
fisherman Mark Hooper collaborated on study 10-EP-07. These projects were designed to determine the methylmercury content in commonly caught species in the state, and were based solely on locally harvested samples.

Offshore Species

Project 10-ST-02 focused on offshore species, including mahi-mahi, king mackerel, wahoo, red porgy, red grouper and gray triggerfish. Fish either were caught by a charter vessel in Morehead City, N.C., or purchased from a local fish market where the source of the fish was known. Tissues from 30 of each species were sampled over three months, except for king mackerel, for which 27 fish were sampled. Tissues were analyzed for mercury using EPA method 7473. Since methylmercury comprises greater than 95 percent of all mercury in fish tissues (Bloom, 1992), total mercury is reported.

Figure 1 shows the average total mercury content of the six species evaluated. Red porgy, gray triggerfish and mahi-mahi were below the EPA action level of 0.3 ppm, while king mackerel, red grouper and wahoo exceeded EPA limits.

Figure 1. Average mercury levels in offshore species harvested in North Carolina.



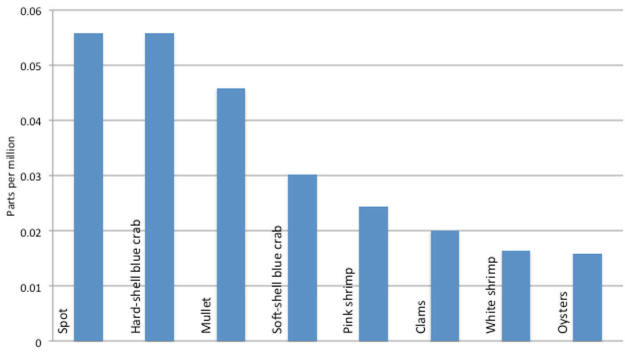
Inshore Species

Project 10-EP-07 focused on several inshore species — oysters, white and pink shrimp, clams, hard and soft-shell blue crabs, mullet, and spot. A total of 600 samples were analyzed using the same methods as those used in project 10-ST-02. *Figure 2* displays the average total mercury of the eight species tested. All inshore species evaluated were well below the EPA action level of 0.3 ppm, which is not shown on the graph.

Selecting Seafood

Decisions on which seafood to purchase are personal, and ideally, made by individuals equipped with the best information. Having data on locally caught species benefits the consumer by providing a more accurate representation of the seafood being purchased, so long as its origin is known.

Figure 2. Average mercury levels in inshore species harvested in North Carolina.



The information provided in this document shows that most of the species harvested in the two studies were within the guidelines established by EPA. In cases where those levels are exceeded, individuals should determine their own risks, based on their health status and age, the species being consumed, and the number of meals that include the species.

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